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ABSTRACT

To evaluate the long term impact of developmental placement, a longitudinal study was initiated with over 500 subjects from a variety of school settings across the state of Michigan. Three groups of subjects were selected: (1) children recommended for a "growth year" before entering kindergarten who followed the recommendation, thus delaying entry to kindergarten for 1 year; (2) children similarly recommended who did not follow the recommendation, thus entering kindergarten at the expected chronological age; and (3) a control group of randomly selected classmates. Questionnaires for parents, teachers, and children covered demographic information, school adjustment, school achievement, and self-esteem information. Results from the fourth year of this study on the effects of giving children a growth year are presented here. Parents indicate that they made the right decision, and would recommend a growth year to friends with children in similar circumstances. Questionnaires with responses are included. (RH)

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When Curriculum Does not Match Readiness

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Description of the Problem

"I'm sorry Mr. and Mrs. Jones, your son Patrick is going to be retained in the First Grade next year. It isn't that he doesn't have the ability to progress, he just hasn't applied himself this year."

"You mean he failed First Grade? Isn't there some alternative? If he's bright enough to do the work, there must be something we can do."

"I'm sorry he is simply not prepared for Second Grade. There is nothing else we can do. It will be better for him in the long run."

Retention in grade level provides the child who has not mastered the content of a given grade level with a chance to go back and try again. Viewed from an academic perspective, the opportunity to go through the material again could be considered a positive alternative. To the child, the child's family and the child's friends, too often retention means the child has failed. At five, six, or seven years of age, the child is already labeled a failure. If the child is allowed to pass on to the next grade without the necessary skills and knowledge, retention in a later grade level is almost inevitable and is likely to cause even deeper emotional trauma. The situation is particularly difficult when the child is academically able. The problem of the mismatch between curriculum and readiness is likely to become more pronounced as the pressure to cover more material at the lower grade levels increases. To date, most of the research on alternatives has focused on the effects of retention and was done in the late sixties and early seventies. This body of research has clearly indicated that retention does not produce long term positive results. Is it true that there are no other alternatives?

Significance of the Problem

Retention, or repeating a grade level has long been an accepted, or at least widely used, alternative for children who were not performing up to the level of their peers. With the present widespread discussion of "The Crisis in Education," renewed interest is again being focused on our schools. Among the solutions offered to ameliorate this "crisis" are: lowering the school entry age to four years of age, back to basics, and moving curriculum components downward (for example, heavier stress on reading and computational skills in Kindergarten instead of First Grade).

There is, however, another perspective from which to view the problem of lack of achievement in academically able children. When viewed from a developmental perspective, low achievement could be a function of a child simply not being physically, socially, emotionally, or cognitively ready for the school atmosphere and curriculum that normally coincide with the child's chronological age. Research on maturation has indicated that a group of children at five years of age chronologically can normally deviate as much as twelve months developmentally with respect to maturation, the boys being the group most

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likely to be lagging maturationally. For example, a child chronologically five years of age may be doing very nicely cognitively, but may be socially and emotionally immature. This child is likely to have difficulty sitting still in a structured classroom setting, paying attention to the task assigned by the teacher, or interacting appropriately with the other children. This child, while very capable cognitively, is likely to experience frustration and ultimately failure for reasons that have nothing to do with intellectual capacity. Jean Piaget's work in cognitive development indicates that there are stages of cognitive development and suggests that if one attempts to teach a child something for which the child is not yet ready, the attempt is not likely to be successful. In this situation it would be a case of the failure of the curriculum to match the child's maturational or situational readiness level, not the teacher or child's failure.

Those looking at the crisis in education from a developmental perspective offer a very different solution to those most commonly suggested. Because major revision of curriculum and curriculum delivery systems are not likely to occur in the near future, many districts are experimenting with an alternative called developmental placement. Developmental placement is the process by which a child is evaluated for next grade placement by means of an assessment of the child's level of cognitive, emotional, social, language and motor development. The determination of the child's likelihood of success in the next environment is then made based on information reflecting the child's overall developmental maturity. In all systems using developmental placement, alternative steps, or grade levels, are offered to children whose evaluation of developmental readiness indicates they may be mismatched with the curriculum or environment of the next major grade level. With this system, the child is not retained in the same grade, but rather has the opportunity to continuously move forward. In many cases the developmentally immature child, at five years of age, will enter a developmental kindergarten, and at six, the regular kindergarten. From there on, if there is no cognitive deficit or other extenuating circumstances, it is expected that the child will progress normally through the grades because the child should now be more synchronized developmentally with established school curriculum patterns. This extra year that is outside the normal grade level progression is commonly referred to as a "growth year." In essence, developmental placement offers more flexibility and possibilities for individualization in the progression through the grade levels to help accommodate different rates of maturation or unusual situations without having to resort to retention or failure. While this concept has received a great deal of support by practitioners, particularly Kindergarten and First Grade teachers, there is virtually no systematic research evaluating the long term impact of developmental placement.

Plan for Solving the Problem

Four years ago a longitudinal study was initiated with over five hundred subjects from a variety of school settings across the state of Michigan. Three groups of subjects were selected: (1) Group A: children who were recommended to have a growth year before entering Kindergarten, and who followed the recommendation, thus delaying the entry to Kindergarten for one year, (2) Group B: children who were recommended to have a growth year before entering Kindergarten and who didn't follow the recommendation, thus entering Kindergarten at the expected chronological age, and (3) Group C: a control group randomly selected from the classmates of subjects in Groups A and B. Three questionnaires were designed to collect information on these

three groups of subjects: (1) a Parent Questionnaire, (2) a Teacher Questionnaire, and (3) a Child Questionnaire. The questionnaires covered demographic information, school adjustment, school achievement, and self-esteem information. These questionnaires (attached) have been administered every spring for the last four years, and will continue to be administered for three more years. Through this information, the investigators expect to be able to examine a variety of issues relating to factors influencing school success in terms of adjustment, achievement, and how these factors relate to developmental placement. Information resulting from this study will provide teachers, school administrators and parents with a basis grounded in research from which to make decisions concerning the progression of individual children through our schools and the optimum allocation of resources with respect to personnel and special programs.

Results from the fourth year of this study on the effects of giving children a growth year are presented here.

APJ/nt

Attachments

Growth Year Study
Fourth Year Results

Unless otherwise indicated, the numbers reported below represent the percentage of responses to teach valid response choice of the total number of responses to each question.

Group A is the group of children who were recommended to have a growth year and were given a growth year at the point in time when it was recommended.

Group B is the group of children who were recommended to have a growth year and were NOT given a growth year at the point in time when it was recommended. Our data, however, provides evidence that many of these children were given a growth year at some later date.

Group C is a control group of randomly selected children who, at the beginning of this study, were classmates of Group A and B children, and who were progressing normally through the grades.

PARENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

	N=	113 GRP A	30 GRP B	125 GRP C
The growth year took place				
-Before entering kindergarten		44	10	NA
-Between Kindergarten and First Grade		38	30	NA
-After 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade		18	60	NA
Chi sq. 2df Sig=.0002				
By observing my child after this year I feel				
-I made the right decision		88	82	NA
-I made the wrong decision		4	11	NA
-I haven't reached a conclusion		8	7	NA
No sig. diff.				
Would you recommend an additional year to your neighbor if her child was in a similar circumstance?				
-Yes		93	63	NA
-No		7	37	NA
Chi sq. 1df Sig=.0003				
Is your child presently living in a two-parent family?				
-Yes		86	89	86
-No		14	11	14
No sig. diff.				

On the following three questions the parents rated their child from 1 to 5 on the descriptors listed below. The percentage of parents selecting each of the five possible responses are provided.

		GRP A	GRP B	GRP C
Was relaxed . . . . . Was under stress				
- 1		37	39	52
- 2		24	29	29
- 3		28	29	14
- 4		2	0	4
- 5		9	4	1
No sig. diff.	Mean=	2.2	2.0	1.7
Got along with the children . . . . .Had difficulties getting along with other children				
- 1		55	57	66
- 2		29	36	22
- 3		9	7	9
- 4		5	0	2
- 5		2	0	1
No sig. diff.	Mean=	1.7	1.5	1.5
Felt good about school . . . . .Felt badly about school				
- 1		49	43	62
- 2		26	25	27
- 3		18	25	11
- 4		2	7	0
- 5		5	0	1
No sig. diff.	Mean=	1.9	2.0	1.5

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CHILD'S QUESTIONNAIRE

	GRP A	GRP B	GRP C
Sometimes are you the best in the class?			
-Yes	46	43	71
-No	54	57	29
No sig. diff. (between A & B)			
Are you sometimes the leader in playing or in things we do in class?			
-Yes	70	57	72
-No	30	43	28
No sig. diff.			

	GRP A	GRP B	GRP C
Does your family like the things you bring home?			
-Yes	96	97	98
-No	4	3	2
No sig. diff.			

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TEACHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

I feel there are other concerns besides youngness.			
-Yes	40	40	16
-No	60	60	84
No sig. diff.			
I have referred this child to support services.			
-Yes	20	21	1
-No	80	79	99
No sig. diff.			
I would rate this child as a			
-leader	16	10	17
-follower	36	41	26
-both at times	47	48	57
No sig. diff.			
This child had			
-many friends	54	37	59
-few friends, but consistent ones	32	43	29
-few, inconsistent friends	13	20	11
-no friends	2	0	2
No sig. diff.			
Behaviorally, this child			
-fell within usual range	76	73	85
-was withdrawn	6	13	4
-was aggressive	7	10	7
-was noncompliant to the everyday expectations	11	3	4
No sig. diff.			

	GRP A	GRP B	GRP C
How do you perceive the child feels about himself?			
-good self-concept	78	83	86
-poor self-concept	22	14	13

No sig. diff.